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THE OBSERVATOR.

Of Mr. Bedford's *Book lately publiſh'd, call'd,* The Evil and Danger of Stage-Plays. *A ſhort Hiſtorical View of the Stage. Her Majeſty's Orders for regulating the Stage, inquir'd into, and the Effects thereof.*

From Wednesday, November 13. to Saturday, November 16. 1706.

Country-m. MAſter, I have long'd for an Opportunity to get your Opinion of this Book, written by the Reverend and Learned Dr. *Bedford* of *Briſtol.* I am glad we have ſuch an honeſt Clergy-man living. I hope we have many of 'em; but I wonder they don't join Forces; that they don't, from every Pulpit and Preſs, fire at the Play-houſes, thoſe Seminaries of Vice, and Marts of Hell, where the Devil keeps open Shop, and gets Multitudes of Cuſtomers. I think, Maſter, this is one of the beſt Books that has been written on this Subject.

Obſ. Indeed, *Roger*, 'tis an excellent Book. I pray God bleſs the Reverend Author, and make him a glorious Inſtrument in his Hand, in pulling down Vice, and battering the Synagogues and Forts of Satan in this Kingdom. He muſt, like his noble Predeceſſors, expect no Reward in this Life. His Reward, like the Weapons of his Warfare, is not carnal; but what adds to the Glory of his Enterprize, and heightens the Honour of his Service, is, that he wages War with Principalities and Powers, with the black Legions of eternal Night, and the united Forces of Hell upon Earth; thoſe Great Ones, that are the Abettors, and who ſtand by the Miniſters of the Prince of Darkneſs, the Players; to him they belong, and from him they have their Credentials.

Bleſſed be God, *Roger*, we have many learned Divines of the Church of *England*, that have ſpoken againſt the Stage from the Pulpit, whoſe righteous Souls are griev'd, ſorely grieved at the Iniquity of the Times; but what can they do more than ſpeak? more than tell their Hearers of it, and of the Judgments of God denounc'd in Scripture againſt theſe Patrons of Vice, theſe Deformers of Reformation, by whoſe Intereſt, a Deluge of Vice has overflow'd the habitable Parts of our Iſland, and for whoſe ſake the Land mourns?

Roger, you and I are often pleaſant and merry; with which, I hope no Body can juſtly reproach us; yet we have often been ſerious on this Subject, and tho' we never expect to reform the Great Ones of the Age, yet, if we can inſtruct the common People, whoſe Souls are as dear to Chriſt, and as much the Purchaſe of his Blood, we have the deſir'd Effect of our Labours, and ſhall heartily rejoyce, when we find others out-do us in this Service. God increaſe the Number of Labourers in this Vineyard.

When we go about a Thing, let us put the Queſtion, *Cui Bono?* For what good End and Purpoſe do we engage in this Enterprize? If neither the Honour of God, the Intereſt of Religion, the Reformation of Manners, the good of our Country, or ſome other juſtifiable Good, be the ultimate End of our Deſign, the Work is ill begun, and not worth ending.

Country-m. Maſter, I am loath to perſwade you fromit, and yet it ſeems dangerous for you to enter upon this Diſcourſe; you know how it has far'd with us already; we have been introduc'd, and repreſented on the Stage, as a Couple of ſtrange Monſters, dreſs'd up in Bear-ſkins; but this was only to the Devil's Servants, the Auditors; but I am affraid we may have ſuffer'd for this by a ſide Wind, when the true Cauſe of our Suffering has been conceal'd.

Obſ. 'Tis true, *Roger*, I have been expos'd on the Stage, and proſecuted for writing againſt the Papiſts at the ſame Time; but it has been done by thoſe, whoſe Favour I always contemn'd, whoſe Malice I never fear'd, and whoſe ill Word was always a Reputation to any Man. 'Tis true too, *Roger*, the Players are her Majeſty's Servants, ſo ſtil'd in their Bills; the higheſt Affront can be given a Proteſtant Queen: Their Patrons are in Power, and have given ſome of the Play-wrights the chief Wheels in the Devil's Clock-work; good Offices under the Government, when o-others, that have written in Defence of our holy Religion, and the Liberties of our Country, have met with another ſort of Uſage.

Roger, we muſt not be affraid to ſpeak or write againſt the Stage; there is no Order againſt it, as concerning the *Scotch* Union; any Man may oppoſe the Union and Argument with Hell, as prejudicial to the Religious and Civil Intereſt of our Realm; and one, for ought I know, may ſpoil the other, that we ſo much wiſh for. God will not be mock'd, and the *Scots* may ſay, we will not unite with you, leſt we partake of your Sins.

I am always mindful of putting Things in a true Light, and therefore I ſuite my Diſcourſe and Stile to the Capacity, as near as I can, of the meaneſt Subject in *England*, and intending, God willing, to go through, at all Times, with this Diſcourſe. For the clearing of the Point, I ſhall give you a ſhort Hiſtorical View of the Stage.

I ſhall not trouble you with a large Account of the *Grecian* and *Roman* Plays; it is ſufficient to tell you, that the Heathens us'd 'em as inſtructive to Vertue, and that their Drammatick Performances, to our Shame be it ſpoken, were far more innocent and modeſt, than ſince Chriſtianity came into the World.

But

But to make *England* the Scene. As nothing comes to Perfection, but by Degrees, ſo Vice had its planting, its maturing, and ripening Time in *England*. The Stage did not put on its vicious Habit, or put off the Attire of Modeſty at once; it creept upon us by Degrees, till it come to its full Zenith in the Reign of King *Charles* the Second, when Pimps, Panders, Paraſites, Players, and Play-wrights, inſtead of Politicians, fill'd a luxurious, inſtead of a vertuous Court.

Johnſon, *Beaumont*, *Fletcher*, and others of the old Drammatick Writers, did not attain to that Pitch of Vice, as their Succeſſors have done; tho' in the Reign of King *Charles* I. there was Encouragement enough given to the Stage; for I have ſeen a Play, printed in that Reign, which was acted on the Lord's Day, before the King at *Whiteball*; which Practice, together with reading the Book of Sports on the ſame Day in the Pulpits, brought the heavy Judgment of a civil War upon this wicked and miſerable Nation; which War terminated in the Blood of the Prince, and in the beſt Blood in *England* beſides. If we would avoid the like Puniſhments, let us beware of the like procuring Cauſes.

But thro' what Rivers, Streams, and ſtanding Pools of Vice muſt we come, to the Reign of King *Charles* II.? not only Knee, but even Chin deep. Such an Inundation of Vice was never known, ſuch an Agreement with Hell was never made, ſuch deadly Wounds to Vertue were never given. The Players, who had the Charters of their Freedoms under the Sign *Manual* and *Lucifer*, had 'em back'd by one who was ſtil'd *the Lord's Anointed*. Poor ſneaking *Vertue* retir'd to melancholy and unfrequented Shades, to dark Alchoves, and ſecret Receſſes; *Vice* went in Triumph, gorgeouſly array'd, and arm'd Cap-a-pee, with Sword and Dagger in Hand, and with Royal Authority to murder *Vertue*. *O tempora! O mores!*

I hope, Gentlemen, you won't aſk me the Meaning of this? Why the Banks of *Vertue* were broken down in that Reign, to let *Vice* flow in upon us? Was it not to effeminate, debauch, and ruin People of all Ranks and Qualities, to procure the intended Effects thereof, that is, an abſolute Monarchy, or rather Tyranny, that by making Men careleſs of their Duty to God, they might the better become heedleſs of their own Liberties, and ſwop their Freedoms for Chains and Fetters?

If ſome of you are ſo complaiſant and good-natur'd, as not to believe any ſuch Deſign in the Iniquities of that Reign, I hope none of you will be ſo harden'd, as to deny, that the Effects of that Corruption of Manners and Irreligion, were the ſame I mention; that thoſe horrid Evils attended that Corruption; that you made ſuch a Jeſt of Religion on the Stage, that it was almoſt beat out of the Pulpits, from whence we had little more than Paſſive-Obedience and Non-Reſiſtance, Sovereign Will and Pleaſure, and other enſlaving Doctrines; ſo that betwixt the Stage and the Pulpit, we ſaw Popery and arbitrary Power come in upon us in the Reign of King *James* II. which put us upon the dangerous Experiment of calling in a foreign Prince, and a foreign Army, to deliver us from both.

In the Reign of King *William* the Stage receiv'd no Check, no Order againſt it; but was ſo far diſcountenanc'd by that Prince, that he never honour'd them with his Royal Preſence during his whole Reign; for which I hear'd him once openly accus'd by a High-flying Prieſt, as a Preſbyterian: A great Honour, I think, to the People of that Perſwaſion! as I then told that Prieſt; that neither Prince nor Subject can decline from the Paths of Wickedneſs, but preſently he's reckon'd out of the Way of the Church, and one of that Party.

King *William* never went to the Play-houſe to learn to fight, where ſome have only got their Martial Knowledge, and learn'd of the Players, in ſham Battels and Skirmiſhes. Queen *Ann* ſucceeded King *William*, and that brings us to conſider the State of the Stage in the preſent Reign.

A Princeſs endow'd with much Vertue, not in the leaſt ting'd with the Indecences of former Reigns, gave us great Aſſurances of the Downfal of the Stage in this. We had a Queen come to the Throne, who by Education and Principles, gave us the firmeſt Hopes of the Growth of Piety, when we ſaw the Garden of *Vertue* water'd by her own Hand; and the greateſt Encouragement given to Religion, by her own Pious Example.

The Players had before been proſecuted at Law, in the Court of *Common Pleas*, in the Year 1699, upon the Statute of 3 *Jac.* 1. for profanely uſing the Name of God upon the Stage, and afterwards, in *Eaſter* Term 1701, the Players belonging to the Houſe in *Little Lincolns-Inn Fields*, were indicted at the *Queen's-Bench* Bar, before the Right Honourable the Lord Chief Juſtice *Holt*, and were found guilty in both Courts.

This was but a ſmall Repulſe, and *Vertue* gain'd but little Ground by it; nor had her Majeſty's Order for prohibiting whatever was offenſive on the Stage; as alſo all other Diſorders and ill Cuſtoms, ſuch as admitting Vizard-maſks, and Gentlemens going behind the Scenes, *&c.* any better Effect; for their Impudence was grown ſo great, *as to inſult the Royal Authority, to dare her ſacred Majeſty, to contemn her pious Care, and viſibly to affront her*, ſays this learned Author, Mr. *Bedford*.

And in Evidence, the ſame learned Author quotes the Play, call'd *An Act at Oxford*, wherin he ſays, "Her "Majeſty is hiſs'd at, her pious Care contemn'd, and "contrary to her Intentions, they go in Sin the more "ſecurely; looking on it as a Diſreſpect to her, for any "other to aſſiſt her in her pious Deſigns. This Author "is pleas'd to look on it as an Affront to her Majeſty, "to think her Regulations not ſufficient, and yet in "the ſame Play he is guilty of Swearing, Curſing, ex-"poſing the Univerſities, and Societies for Reformati-"on, the Aldermen and Officers, Marriage, and Reli-"gion it ſelf, and pleads for Pimping and Whoring; "and that her Majeſty may proceed no farther, he gives "fair Warning, (tho' in reſpectful Terms) *that the re-"gulating of the Play-houſe, may occaſion a Rebellion.*

Country-m. Impudent Fellows! Occaſion a Rebellion! Her Majeſty has God and all good Men of her ſide, and they have the Devil and his Imps of theirs; let 'em rebel as ſoon as they pleaſe.

Obſ. Roger, her Majeſty did not value their Threats; for ſince that, her Majeſty has authoriz'd Mr. *Vanbrugh*, and Mr. *Congreve*, to inquire into the Plays, for the better reforming the Abuſes and Immorality of the Stage, *&c.*

Country-m. Maſter, I think thoſe two People are both Play-wrights, and then we can't expect much Reformation.

Obſ. That ſhall be our Taſk the next time we talk on this Head; we will then inquire how far theſe Gentlemen have anſwer'd their Patent, and how they have reform'd the Stage. And now, *Roger*, I wiſh thee a good Night.

Advertiſements.

Theſe are to give Notice,

*** That *Mary Kirleus*, the Widow of *John Kirleus*, Son of Dr. *Thomas Kirleus*, a Collegiate of *London*, and Sworn Phyſician in Ordinary to King *Charles* II. ſells (rightly perpar'd) his Famous Drink and Pills, eminently experienc'd above 50 Years, to cure all Ulcers, Sores, Scabs, Itch, Scurfs, Scurvies, Leproſies, Running of the Reins, and the moſt inveterate Venereal Diſeaſe, with all its attending Symptoms, in all Conſtitutions, at all Seaſons of the Year, without Fluxing, Confinement, or the Uſe of *Mercurial* Preparations, (which is generally deſtructive.) Theſe Medicines need no Words to expreſs their Virtues; the many miſerable Ones that have been cur'd after given over by others, and the daily and ſpeedy Cures they perform, ſufficiently recommend them as the moſt Soveraign Remedy in the World againſt all ſuch Malignities. She cures many after Fluxing, and in Compaſſion to the Diſtreſs'd, will deal according to the Patient's Ability. The Drink is 3*s.* the Quart, the Pills 1*s.* the Box, with Directions; and Advice *gratis* to thoſe afar off, as if preſent. ☞ She lives at the *Golden Ball*, in *Hand-Court*, over againſt *Great Turn-Stile*, in *Holborn*.

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